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$\sqrt{2}$ :  
THE POWER CLUB

Waking up in the early morning the birds going bee boo poip outside a pale day up on the third floor. Walter who was in the seventh grade was watching the sun creep across the far wall through his shut eyes; it was like progressive excitations of a red circulatory lattice.

His dream was him hovering over the hours of his life. He had the gods and goddesses quiz, and also a test on square roots, and then there was gym. There had been another dream. He pulled the blanket in between his legs as he tried to remember it. The alarm clock which had a chicken on it and was red began to squawk. He shut it off. Then it squawked again. It fell on the ground; some of the glass was rattling around inside it, under the bed. Below he could hear the house waking up, like intrauterine motions in the bed itself, his mom shutting the cabinet on her way to the bathroom, his older brother sliding quickly down the stairs, the front door of the house making the walls shake a little when his dad came back in from getting the paper. All the bed just humming.

Walter!

Walter was trying to recall a certain discovery which he'd made at some point during the night. He'd thought it up, and it was the secret to everything. He was afraid of forgetting it, so he wrapped it up, and put it in a box, so that if he remembered it again, the remembering of it would involve taking it out of the box. And in that way he would remember which thought it was that he'd thought was so great.

He'd been listening to his older brother and his dad talk all night about *the problem*. The problem was big. His brother had made a podcast about it. When Walter's brother's friends were over, they sat in the kitchen and ate pizza and they talked about the problem. Last night, his brother had been trying to explain it to his dad: he basically said it was about why some things are harder to figure out than other things like at a most basic level. Walter's mom made him some mint tea, and then Walter spent some time parading around in the basement, his hands in his sweatpants, chanting the names of the Greek and Roman gods to memorize for Miss Edwards class. He was resting on the bed and fell asleep with the binder over his face so that he was inhaling the notes he meant to review on why the square root of 2 is like it is. Then he threw the binder off and shut off the lights. He'd had maybe four hours of sleep. He was thinking about coming home from school and taking a nap. He heard his dad come up the stairs and sit down on the bed. Max could smell the coffee on him. Mmm. His dad was like, It's 7:05. No it's not... Walter squinted at the clock it was really more like 7:01. His dad was always exaggerating. On the car ride to school his dad had the clock set forward either 6 minutes or 8 minutes forward, he couldn't remember... His dad went back downstairs. His mom came up to look for something in the closet joined to the bedroom. Walter, you need to get on a schedule, you know. You just need to go to bed and wake up at a regular time. You just need to get on a schedule.

Yeah, mm, I'm working on it... I was trying to go to bed, but it wasn't easy, I fell asleep but I woke up in the middle of the night, and I was lying there staring at the ceiling... You know how there are all those little bumps and things on the ceiling... I was actually looking at them, and the moon was coming in through the window, and that lit everything up.... And all of a sudden I could see a pattern in the bumps on the ceiling—it was like a plane had gone slice through the bodies of the little mountains at a certain angle, and a thin slice of the ceiling was

coming loose and starting to slide slowly so I could see the part I'd sliced off better than the rest —and actually I could divide the bumps up in different ways, and each time I made a division I saw it like animated a little, like the part that was different was shimmering and drifting to show how it was different... The ceiling just came apart like a biscuit!

Very little of this with the exception of biscuit was able to escape his mouth. His mom with a basket full of clothing had been downstairs for a while, which became apparent when he heard his dad's distinctive weight coming up the stairs for the second time.

Walter!

His dad WHIPPED the covers from the bed with a flourish. At the last second Walter managed to snag a bit of it with his foot. He curled up rather violently in trying to bring the covers to his chest. The mattress was so exposed.

It's 7:15.

His dad walked back down the stairs.

Ahhh! No no no! Why? Why? Why? Why? WHAT IS THE POINT.

In exhausted fury he rolled off the edge of the bed onto the covers on the floor. He crawled over his rug, and stumbled down the stairs with a side to side tottering motion, and rounded the corner, and went into the bathroom, and turned on the hot water, and stood there silently completely immobile under the water. The pain of sleep hummed all over his head and shoulders. It hurt even to close his eyes so instead he looked at the bottle of shampoo on the ledge which had instructions in English and French and German and Italian and Dutch. *Bij aanraking met de ogen met voldoende water afspoelen...*

Upp! A part of his body came online.

He realized this when he realized he had to fart. He paused there water rushing over him.

It occurred to Walter that he'd never actually seen himself fart before. So still outwardly immobile he waited while the fart passed through the various internal waystations within him, building pressure here now there, slamming against some intestinal wall, squeezing through a constrained bit, until he felt that tingling in his anus that meant that he was really about to fart, at which point he twisted his neck back, in order to see his relatively hairless butt as the fart was about to escape. He twisted and twisted, and then he gave his body a little pulse, and there it was.

But as the fart slipped out, he felt something crack in his neck—he whipped his head back around—and was like, that was weird. And then he felt an intensity rising in him, which was at first hard to distinguish from the hot water, and which he realized at length was *pain*. His whole neck was tingling, and his head felt like steam, and he stumbled a little, and the intensity was rising and rising in him; as its level increased, he experienced a proportionate distancing, so that his vision shrank to a point drifting to the side, a little like the effect when two mirrors are facing each other, slightly askew. He crumpled against the slick wall of the shower.

A moment later he opened his eyes groaning. He was on the shower floor. His whole body was icy and clammy despite the heat and his heart was pounding. He sort of mindlessly stirred himself and without even getting a towel left the bathroom and lay down on his parents' bed. He breathed deeply. He breathed deeply again. Then he got up and went back into the bathroom and toweled off.

The black tiles were cold against his feet. Over the bright white sink he stared at himself in the concave mirror. He had just started shaving so he lathered up the brush, his hands shaking, and dragged it ever so lightly against his upper lip. Maybe because his friend Ann had shown him a picture of Frida Kahlo the other day, his eyes were drawn to the fine hairs between his eyebrows. Well.

He positioned the gillette razor as carefully as he could between his eyebrows and dragged it down a little. His heart sank as he felt it diverge slightly from the perpendicular due to the topography of his face. Upon inspection, he found that he'd overshortened his left eyebrow ever ever so slightly. Well. He angled the razor to make the complementary correction. Dum!

Perfect, he said, and knocked the razor against the side of the sink to get the hairs out. He gathered water into his cupped hands and rinsed his face. When he looked up into the mirror, he realized unfortunately that he'd washed off what seemed like most of his right eyebrow, but was really about a centimeter and a half of it. He placed the razor square between his eyes; he however registered a veto.

So leaving the bathroom, Walter went to go put on his cargo pants and t-shirt and sweater and socks. Then he went downstairs, bouncing a little on the last steps, coming in through the mudroom which a little of the chill misty day had osmosed into. He attempted nonchalantly to orient his right side away from his parents. His brother, wearing a t-shirt with a pyramid on it, walked by him on his way outside, and smiled. Entering the kitchen, Walter declared, "Can I just stay home today? I literally woke up and went over everything that is going to happen today, and I know exactly what it is, and how it is going to happen, and I don't see the point of actually going through with it since it's basically like it's already happened."

"What do you have today?" his mom asked.

"I have a quiz in history and math," he said.

"It's 7:30," his dad said, handing him a bagel not nearly toasted enough with a little cream cheese.

"Oh wait I forgot!!!"

Walter turned on his heel and ran into the basement where the computer was, and waved the mouse around so the screensaver would go away which was pictures of various galaxies. He went to Start and then hovered over All Programs for just the right amount of time so that the scroll thing of programs appeared. He went down to the arrow at the bottom until he saw Microsoft Publisher come up. He clicked it and went to File, Open, and then in the text place he put C: and double clicked on the folder there called WLTRSTFF and inside that folder there was a folder called TOP SECRET and inside that folder there was a folder DO NOT PENETRATE ANY FARTHER CLASSIFIED BY ORDER OF WLTR and inside that folder there was a folder TAKE YOUR LAST CHANCE TO TURN BACK FOOL and inside that folder there was a folder UNLESS YOU ARE ME MY MASTER which he double clicked on and inside that there was a Microsoft Publisher document called FINAL MEMBERSHIP CARD INVENTORY and he doubled clicked on that. In Publisher appeared the page divided into two columns of just the right width, with little rows of just the right height, so they could be printed as business cards. He crawled underneath the computer and plugged in the printer from behind, and then crawled back out. The printer was snorting to itself as it came alive. Walter grabbed the mouse and clicked print.

Out of the printer came

WALTER JOSEPHSON

Senior Architect and IDEAS.

AUTHENTIC POWER CLUB MEMBERSHIP CARD.

LENGTH: 1 LIFETIME.

ID#: 5<sup>19</sup>+0.1990

ENTITLEMENT: 1 free computer program.

*Dear new member, come 11/19 to designated recess location for the beginnings of proceedings of top importance.*

KIRKBY OZ

Vice Architect and TREASURER/FINANCIAL ADVISOR.

AUTHENTIC POWER CLUB MEMBERSHIP CARD.

LENGTH: 1 LIFETIME.

ID: 0

ENTITLEMENT: 1 free computer program.

*Dear new member, come 11/19 to designated recess location for the beginnings of proceedings of top importance.*

GERMY SHULTZ

Resident Astrophysicist and Vocalist.

AUTHENTIC POWER CLUB MEMBERSHIP CARD.

LENGTH: 1 LIFETIME.

ID: 7

ENTITLEMENT: 1 free computer program.

*Dear new member, come 11/19 to designated recess location for the beginnings of proceedings of top importance.*

ALEXIA DANGERFIELD

Defense Shield and Catering.

AUTHENTIC POWER CLUB MEMBERSHIP CARD.

LENGTH: BINDING UNTIL GRADUATION.

ID: XII

ENTITLEMENT: 1 free computer program.

*Dear new member, come 11/19 to designated recess location for the beginnings of proceedings of top importance.*

ANTHONY PATRICOLA

Sludge Harvester and THE ANNIHILATOR

AUTHENTIC POWER CLUB MEMBERSHIP CARD.

LENGTH: 4 months

ID: 9999999999999979

ENTITLEMENT: 1 free computer program.

*Dear new member, come 11/19 to designated recess location for the beginnings of proceedings of top importance.*

JENNY BACKSAY

RAAAANdOm NNNuMbEr GGeNeRaToR

AUTHENTIC POWER CLUB MEMBERSHIP CARD.

LENGTH: Befstew.

ID: Digit between 0 and 9 but not 0 or 7.

ENTITLEMENT: 1 free computer program.

*Dear new member, come 11/19 to designated recess location for the beginnings of proceedings of top importance.*

.... a few more... and an extra ...

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AUTHENTIC POWER CLUB MEMBERSHIP CARD.

LENGTH: \_\_\_\_\_

ID: \_\_\_\_\_

EMERGENCY BACKUP FOR INSTANT MEMBERSHIP.

ENTITLEMENT: 1 free computer program.

*Dear new member, come 11/19 to designated recess location for the beginnings of proceedings of top importance.*

They came perforated so he could just fold and rip out the cards as needed. He grabbed the two pages coming out of the printer and headed back upstairs, swinging his backpack around from back to front, and trying to hold it there as he tried to stuff the two pages inside it. He stopped and put the backpack down, and slid it in between two folders. Flying out the door.

His mom waved from the side, as he plonked down the stairs, onto the path to the car. There was a squirrel on the rim of the water basin.

“Good morning,” said his dad.

Walter put the bagel on the floor and buckled in.

In the car, he found himself staring straight ahead at the frosty windshield, imagining himself like in a cartoon, the streets no longer extending into the distance, but compressed to a plane, and dipping below sight, bringing new stop signs, houses that looked like fish heads, houses that looked like donkey heads, houses that seemed surprised or sad, words on signs floating up and sunning themselves in the light of his eyes as they presented themselves. Triangles formed by streetlights at intersections. He didn't even feel like he was moving most of the time.

“So,” his dad said, “I wouldn't worry, I don't think anyone's going to notice.”

“...really?”

“Yeah—people just see what they expect themselves to see. But you have to be careful with the razor. Why did you want to shave that part anyway? You don't need to do that.”

“I don’t know...”

“Ladies usually use tweezers.”

“Cheese.”

At the border of the fields, the car line for the middle school formed an enormous slinky of stopping and starting. They had a lot of time to just sit there and wait. Out the driver’s side window, the red eye of the battleship was blinking through the fog. The radio was tuned to the classic rock station. It was in the middle of that song Won’t Get Fooled Again. His dad got excited and turned up the volume. It was weird to hear something that loud when it was still so barely lit and chilly outside. A great suspense would build during the parts of the song with the permuting organ chords drifting from ear to ear, redeemed by guitar chords like slicing open fat sacks of bright coins, or very shiny golden fish. With each slice the pearlescent contents would spurt onto the floor; in between his dad would drum on the steering wheel. The organ warm and green and kind of clarinety would do its thing while fluttering around in slow motion—the drums would creep in, his dad on the steering wheel, the organ, and then... the scream! And his dad let out a pleasing roar! Walter was smiling.

His mouth turned thoughtful though when they rounded the final bend; Walter discovered that he could see his sort of friend Ann in the front seat two cars ahead of them. Ann was the girl who always had a funny way of walking to the classroom, and once she’d invited Walter to her house, and they’d eaten rice krispie treats together. They crept up a space. Maybe four or five cars could drop their kids off at the same time. Ann didn’t start to get out of her car until the very last moment. By that time, Walter was already walking on the sidewalk over to her, having said goodbye to his dad. He stuffed his bagel in his pocket.

He could hear what Ann was saying to her mother.

“You’re right, mom, that’s a great idea, why don’t I just memorize the whole multiplication table right now before homeroom when I’m supposed to help out with Stephanie’s birthday decorations...I told you they want me to draw a trilobite! I don’t know why Kathleen doesn’t draw it herself. You know, she’s not a bad artist... No! The point is there’s no way I’m going to do well on this factors quiz if I don’t have my multiplication table memorized, and I told you I couldn’t do it last year or the year before that or the year before that and I can’t do it now, so BUG OFF!”

Walter saw Ann’s mother reach across the passenger seat and grab her (Ann’s) coat.

The adult said: “You’re hurting me, Ann, and you are hurting yourself with your thoughtless words. I know it must be hard to see right now, but when you look back at this memory years down the line you will be ashamed of what you have done. Yes, think about that while you’re at school. Because when you come home you’re going to have to tell me exactly what we’re going to do to fix this little problem. Now don’t you dare slam that door!”

Like a squirrel, Walter had been hiding by their right tail light. His backpack had given him a slouch that kept him out of sight. As Ann’s mother drove off, he leapt somewhat gracefully into action. He came up behind Ann, lingering a moment in her blind spot. He could tell she was in the middle of tears. Actually, he could hear that she was whispering too. She was whispering, “How? How?...”

“Ann,” said the voice.

Walter came into view, walking up alongside her.

“What do you want?” she asked dully.

She was wearing a Hello Kitty backpack heavily decorated with markers of different colors. Her eyes were very large and melting slightly in fine grained rivulets, and Walter could

see that the little place right above where the lips joined in a pleasing twist was red from her tears. She had on sweatpants underneath her jeans.

“Hey... I had a question for you.”

“Yeah?”

“Oh uh I guess it was that I was wondering if you wanted to join my club. I’m starting one,” he said.

“What club is it?”

“It’s called the POWER CLUB,” said Walter. “I’ll tell you all about it! I guess we’re late.”

By now they’d entered the school. The lockers were echoing with announcements in the brief moment of empty hallway. Just a flutter of pages. Anna and Walter started walking towards the attendance office, which was across the building.

“I have this membership card all ready actually, if you want,” he said.

“For me?”

“Yeah!” said Walter, swinging his backpack around again. “Let’s stop by this water fountain so I can fill it out for you.”

“Wait actually can we go to the bathroom by the cafeteria?”

“Uh yeah I guess if you want.”

“Just cause,” said Ann.

Once they were inside the bathroom, down the hallway, towards the shop on the opposite wall from the kitchen, behind the cafeteria, Walter locked the door, and Ann pulled out a bag of blueberries from her backpocket. She leaned against the back wall and put her foot up on the

toilet seat. Walter put his backpack down in the corner, and looked at the sink, which was all covered in pink soap.

“I brought these blueberries,” Ann said. “They’re like little energy pellets for tiny animals. Sometimes I just like to eat them.”

“Do you want one?” she asked.

“Oh I never really have blueberries!” Walter said.

He took one from her and put it in his mouth. It exploded a little.

“They’re kind of like gushers,” he said. “Though obviously blueberries came first.”

“Yeah I know right,” said Ann.

Walter took another one. Some impulse made him stick it in his nose.

“It just fits,” he said.

Ann brought one to her nose to sniff it.

“Yeah I have gym so I don’t mind being late,” said Walter, putting a blueberry in the other nostril. “I have important business to speak of.”

“Oh really?”

“Yes, actually I was going to ask if you would like to be inducted cordially into this club that I’m starting of all really cool people—it’s called—the POWER CLUB?”

Ann laughed.

“What do you do?” she asked.

“Oh we investigate the nature of reality mostly.”

“That’s stupid,” said Ann.

“Do you know about the square root of 2? — What do you mean, it’s stupid?”

“Too general. I mean what are you guys actually going to do?”

“Woah woah,” he said. “We are going to have a meeting to figure out about *that*.”

Walter had begun to pace a little back and forth between the handicapped rail and the corner.

“But really,” he continued, turning on her, “do you know about the square root of 2?”

“No well I’ve heard of it I suppose, but—”

Walter enjoyed the pageantry of things. He dipped his finger in the pink soap and dragged a triangle into existence on the mirror, with sides 1 and 1 and the square root of 2.

“There is a very ancient myth,” he said. “A terrible secret at the heart of mathematics. Men have been murdered over this thing.”

Ann snorted.

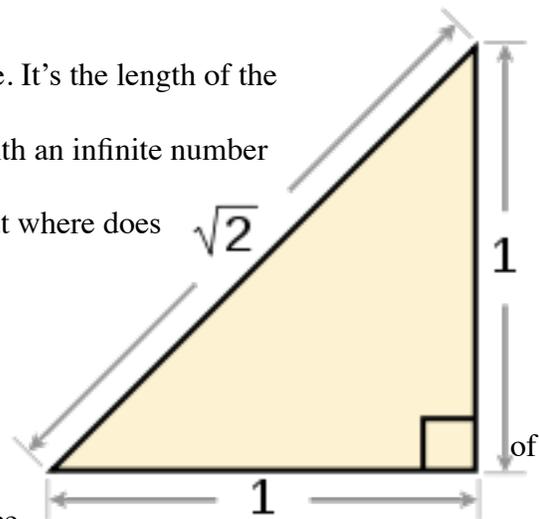
“Okay,” said Walter. He went over to his backpack and extracted a folded piece of paper.

“This is from my brother’s website,” he said.

He unfolded it and read:

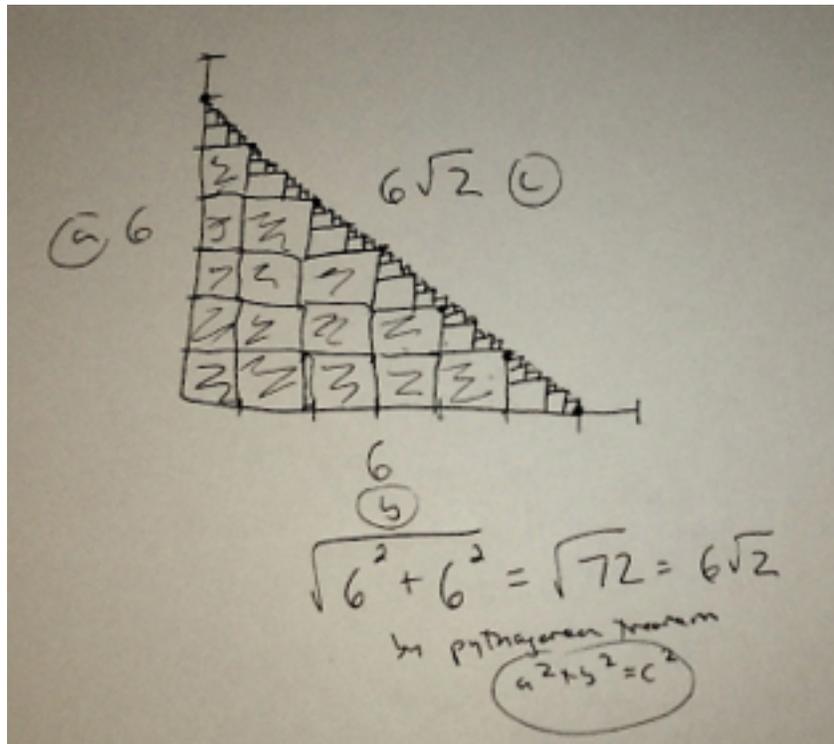
“The square root of 2 comes from the triangle. It’s the length of the diagonal line if the other lines are 1. It’s a number with an infinite number of decimal places. It’s like infinitely complicated. But where does it come from?”

“You’re measuring the length along the *diagonal line*. BUT you have to measure it in terms *the other two lines*, because those are your axes. Since



there’s 2 lines, you need 2 coordinates to measure the length of a diagonal bit: 1 for amount down and 1 for amount over.”

“What the heck,” said Ann.



“No no just wait a bit!”

Walter was holding the paper in such a reverent way that Ann remained silent.

“Okay. You know how on a computer you can see that diagonal lines are jagged because of the pixels, and look like stairs and not straight lines? How can we make the line *actually* straight? How can we do that? Well, why not make it so that however far you zoom in on the diagonal, you zoom into ever smaller ups and downs forever trying to fill in the line? This getting ever smaller for eternity makes it so that the down and overs blur into an actually straight line. But the length of the resulting number is therefore infinitely complicated. Infinite 2 dimensional *down* and *over* information has to get compressed along 1 dimension: the length of the diagonal. It never quite fits, but it’s always getting closer. The upshot is that instead of going down and over, you can always go diagonally 1.4142135... and get to the same place. The complicatedness of the square root of 2 is the friction that occurs when 2 dimensions that don’t quite fit grind

together. This is origin of kabbalistic belief in the shattering of the vessels. The great and terrible secret is that the universe does not fit into itself everywhere, that there are tiny rifts between dimensions, transdimensional fissures, out of which life and chaos flow. That this rift at the heart of reality can even be heard is to be considered one of the most remarkable findings of the early Greeks, even as those of the Pythagorean sect forbade their members from speaking of it. They were not alone. The tritone for centuries was banned by church fathers who referred to it as the *diabolus in musica*.”

“Is this a real thing?” inquired Ann.

“Do you want to hear it?”

“Hear what?”

“The sound of the transdimensional rift fissure.”

Walter pulled out a mini tape recorder that his dad had let him borrow. He turned it on and pressed play.

Tinnily, there was the sound of two pianos keys, one being struck just before the other. The first one probably a middle C, wavering slightly from the vibrations of the tape recorder itself. The second was an F# above that, which was the tritone, and it struck Walter and Ann both with a sonic blow, as if something had knocked the tops of the heads off, the last two inches of their heads becoming numb with a kind of luminescent shimmering high pitched trailing off hesitant tritone fire. Then the two notes C and F# were struck at once, and Ann could hear a wail infinitely failing.

Walter returned to the paper: “You hear the C and then the F#. The tritone wants to resolve down to F and up to G at the same time. It hangs wavering infinitely dissonantly approaching the middle which is constantly falling away. The frequency of F# is the frequency of

C times the square root of 2. It splits the octave right down the middle, a kind of gaping wound at the heart of the musical scale. Given any 2 dimensions, there is a wound between them, which is the mathematical origin of tension.”

“Oh my god.”

“So we’ll talk about stuff like that.”

“Play it again!”

Walter did. C F#. C F#.

“Is there *any* way to tap all that energy?” Ann asked in a hushed tone.

Walter who had been looking down at his shoes, raised his head and fixed her with his eyes.

“We’ve been looking,” he said. “I don’t know! They’ve been keeping it secret for years so not many people know about it.”

Ann threw a blueberry in the air and caught it.

“Do you think things really are broken?” she asked, chewing.

Walter scratched his elbow.

“I always say I think it’s weird we can move at all,” he answered finally.

Then he bent down and pulled out the sheet of membership cards from his backpack, and folded back the column, and then the row, and ripped out the blank card.

“Were those on the website too?”

“No I made these. But yeah it was my brother who wrote that stuff. It was on his website. He’s into really crazy stuff; he’s been investigating for years. Name?”

“Ann Wojek. What’s your brother like?”

“Haha, he’s a senior. Position? Like what do you want your job title to be?”

“Uh Drawing and Advice,” said Ann, after tapping her finger on her lip.

“And I’ll give you a lifetime membership—unless?”

“No that’s cool.”

“Okay now choose an ID. It can be any number... Or a way to make a number.”

“What’s the number for?”

Walter looked up from his knee on which he was writing.

“Okay,” Ann said. “The loneliest number.”

Walter laughed.

“Which one’s that?”

“Just write it.”

“You mean like a prime number?”

“Don’t talk to me about prime numbers!”

“Oh you have a factors test today.”

“Yeah! How did you know that?”

“Oh you know I know some people in the class.”

“I’m really bad at math,” Ann said.

Walter handed her the freshly minted card.

“What does this mean, Entitlement: 1 free computer program?” she asked.

“Oh it means just what it says. You tell me what kind of computer program you want and I’ll write you one for free. Like one where you can type stuff in, and it’ll say something back to you, and then you can type more stuff in. Or just a problem you want solved, and it’ll give you the answer...”

Ann was looking at herself in the mirror.

“You think about it and let me know if you have any ideas,” said Walter. “You should come to the meeting today! It’s on the card. Designated location is cafeteria.”

“Yeah okay,” she said, putting the card on the sink edge. Her eyes didn’t leave the mirror.

“Can I hear the tritone again?” she asked.

Walter played it for her once more. C F#. C F#. C F#. Walter wondered if he was imagining her eyes were getting wet.

“Okay can you go now?” she asked.

“Yeah I should be getting to gym.”

Walter swung his backpack.

“Okay see ya,” he said, opening the door.

“Bye,” said Ann.

Once the door was shut, Walter turned around, and went into the second single bathroom. He swung his backpack down, and folded his coat on top of it, and dropped his pants, and made sure the door was locked, and sat down. He had to poop, again!

\*

Ann thought about her one free computer program throughout the morning. She was thinking about it while she finished cleaning up in the bathroom, while doing the stupid decoration thing for Stephanie, while finally getting to her locker. She had to think about it during Mr DeCan’s class.

His head really did look like a can or something. It came in two parts. The bulge of his mouth and jaw was the first part, connected to the second part, an upright cylinder, whose higher reaches formed the basis for his tall ridged forehead. His hair was like when a bit of the lid is still

attached to the can. In Mr DeCan's class, which was geography, they had to get into groups and make maps of imaginary countries.

Ann was in a group with Ede and Katalina. With one look at Katalina, Ann decided that there was no way this girl was going to contribute anything. Katalina had eyes that tilted at an acute angle so that she always had on a dumb expression of compassion. She was kind of like Ede's Igor. They always went around together. Ede, on the other hand, was small and bony, with wild brillo like hair, and a complicated tiny face that was pale and difficult to look at. Ann was imagining those tiny hands on her face, and she shivered.

Katalina smiled at her in a motherly way.

"So," said Ann.

They were sitting at four desks pushed together. A big piece of poster board was on the desks, and they had markers. Ede was on the very edge of her seat. She cracked her wrists.

"What should we call it?" asked Ann.

"What was that you said," Katalina asked Ede.

"We should figure out what kind of place it is," said Ede. "First."

"It should be really polluted," said Ann.

"It could be polluted. I was thinking an island," said Ede. "That exports..."

"What do you think it should export," Ede whispered to Katalina.

"Oh, I don't know, Ede. It could export all sorts of things," answered Katalina. "Soap."

"It could be an export hub," said Ede. "It could export everything. People could come to the island to do their shopping."

"Ede, I never thought I'd hear you mention the word *shopping!*"

“Why don’t you get started coloring in the water,” Ede said to Katalina. “We don’t have that much time.”

She was staring down at the poster board as if sizing it up.

“Oh I like this blue,” said Katalina, picking up the blue marker, and starting to make swirls from the corner inwards.

“Here I’m just going to draw rectangles in places,” said Ann, “and decorate them, and you can have that be labels for things.”

“Okay, but don’t do too many,” said Ede, who had started to draw the outline of an island.

“I also might put a pizza place here,” said Ann.

“Don’t!” said Ede, a little too sharply.

So Ann retreated to her marker, whose designs became more and more elaborate as the class went on.

All was quiet until Ann intruded into Ede's space again, leaning back to get a better view, so that her hip cracked. Adopting the same pose, Ede took in the poster board; she came to appreciate the superfluity of what Ann had so carefully wrought.

“What are you doing?” she cried.

“Wait I just have to add these more links for it to be symmetrical.”

A baroque lattice joined various rectangles, heavily ornamented in seven different colors.

“No! Oh my god, you ruined it.”

“Uh calm down,” said Ann. She tried to laugh. “It’s not ruined.”

“I see what you were trying to do, Ann,” said Katalina.

“No but seriously, it’s not ruined,” said Ann. She bent over. “Lemme finish this part.”

“No!” said Ede. “You’ve already caused enough damage.”

“Hah well you ain’t seen nothing yet,” said Ann, with a weak laugh, trying not to grimace.

She tried to go back to her work.

“NO! YOU’VE DONE ENOUGH,” shrieked Ede.

“Ede,” said Katalina.

Ede tried to wrestle the marker from Ann, and they fumbled with it for a bit, until Ann let it go, and kind of jumped back from her opponent.

“Okay, whatever!”

Ann looked out across the classroom. There was enough chatter that they hadn’t been heard.

“I’m going to the bathroom,” said Ann.

What the frick did I say, she was thinking.

She had an idea for a computer program for Walter. You’d feed into it things her mom would say and the program would analyze it, figure out how it was that her mom made her feel so bad no matter what she said.

Instead of going to the bathroom, Ann walked incredibly slowly down the hallway, and when she got on the other end of it, she leaned against the wall, and sunk down to the floor, so that she was sitting on it with her puffy jeans. From her bag she pulled out her gameboy.

It was a Pikachu gameboy color. It fit her hands perfectly. The battery part rested comfortably on her lower palms, and her fingers curled up to work the surface elegantly, running her fingers over the buttons and leaning forward with an extended thumb to go forward or backwards on the D pad.

Ann liked walking around the house with it held out in front of her while the volume was turned up. She would follow her mom doing the laundry, or cutting the cat's nails, or waiting around for the car to start up because it was so cold outside. Through the chilly air an electronic snare would keep time on the off beat; sometimes it would do a double tap. The melody kept returning to these joyful fragments that would trail off wistfully, the electronic snare crawling its way forward in time rung by rung. Her dad said it sounded like Kraftwerk. He said that meant Power Station. This made sense. The music was like a train running through the open air, and she could feel the map of the world she was in stretch out indefinitely in all directions. She knew that this dimension was in the gameboy, but she also felt like she was this eyeball stalk intersecting the 2d plane which she could see extending even as she could see the laundry room around her.

The game was called Harvest Moon. There was a little farmer who lived in a farm house. Ann could move the farmer around in any of the four directions, and whatever direction he went in, there'd be this little dog that would follow him around. In the farm house, there was a bed where you had to go sleep. This would also save the game. If you didn't sleep, you might just pass out. Also on the farm, there was a barn, so when you bought a cow, then that would be in there. You could go up to the cow and milk it and get some milk. Ann didn't have a cow yet, nor a horse, though you could get one of those too, and put it in the barn. You could ride the horse around, or just let it wander outside. The animals liked to be brought out; they would become morose on wet days.

There also was the chicken coop. Ann decided to go there first today. The dirt paths of the farm were still shaded with morning light. The chickens would be bouncing around in the hay at this time. She had to pick the eggs up off the floor, and raise them above her head, and run to the little storage bin near her mailbox. A guy would take away her produce at the end of the day from the storage bin. He sold your stuff for you and brought you the money.

Next on the list was the tool shed. Ann broke in and went immediately to the shelves for the hammer, sickle, and ax. Then with her dog at her ankles, Ann raced the little farmer onto the field with his tools. Step one was to clear the field. You had to use the sickle to slice up the little squares of weeds; use the hammer to break up large rocks as big as two by two squares; and use the ax to break up stumps.

Step two was getting the land ready by hoeing a square at a time, being careful to make a formation that would allow access to each plant for watering. Get a bag of seeds in town and toss them in the air, water plots every day unless rain. Soon depending on the seeds, ripe really red tomatoes, whose spot of red would get bigger and more round by the day; corn with yellow bursting out of its suit of green; and cabbages... You had to pick them up and carry them over to the storage bin ideally before nightfall.

You could also marry a girl, and she'd live with you and the dog. Possibly you could have a baby, Ann wasn't sure.

Ann found that she could approach the tasks of this game with a kind of effortless intensity. She had become quite sophisticated. Her little farmer made almost no wasted movement. Nor were his movements hurried or awkward. Like a deliberate bee, he approached a hexagram of peas and offered it water from different angles. Plants could take a solid week to reach their full form, so that Ann often had to balance tending to new shoots while harvesting

mature plants. She was always thinking at least a month ahead in order to keep everything bright and colorful in the field.

She went to bed and slid the power button, walking late towards math class, hoping she'd miss the test. But she didn't. She hesitated a moment out the door, thinking about her entrance, then she broke in, slightly out of breath. Everyone had their heads down. Mrs. Zeig handed her a test. Ann sat, slinging her backpack to the floor. She took out a pencil. The door opened a second time and Jack Nacheinander walked in holding a piece of lined paper against his bleeding forearm. He sat down heavily beside her, and inspected the paper, pried it loose from the bleeding scrape. Mrs. Zeig handed him a test too.

Jack always stuck his tongue out during a test. His face would get super red, and he'd scratch at his sandy hair, and periodically pinch a bit of his t-shirt and lift it.

Factors, she thought.

Factorize 72.

Oh that was lucky, she thought. 9 times 8. So two threes and three twos.

She tried a few more problems, sometimes drawing pictures.

A few more calculations.

She was staring down at her page so intently, that all of a sudden she became aware of how enormous in absolute terms was the distance between the floor with her backpack and the edge of the desk.

She felt a prickling on her scalp. It was already three fourths through the class. She had eleven more problems. The floor seemed a thousand miles away. It was just taking too long to work this out, and plus there were these word problems which had stumped her. She'd made some notes for them, promised to come back, but there was no going back. How embarrassing would it be if she fainted right here? She found she couldn't think about anything else but fainting. Pull yourself together!

She started pinching her arm, and did a few more problems this way.

She decided to put her head down a second to just chill out. Her pencil was still clutched in her hand. She could feel the edge of the desk against her forehead, and the mark it would leave. It was dark and quiet. She did what she sometimes did to orient herself, which was to imagine using her attention to draw shapes in her head, her attention leaving white trails in the darkness as she waved it around. So she could make circles, or loop de loops, or complicated weavings and turnings. And the game was to see how complicated and long you could make your trail and still keep a clear image of it in your mind. You could go at it with two points of attention. Or leave trails on multiple tangles at once... If she concentrated, Ann could keep in mind about three crossings and fourish loops.

The effect of all this was a kind of gentle stirring of the brain.

She filled in quickly the rest of the answers, as the bell rang.

Mrs. Zeig took her paper. Jack Nacheinander turned to Ann and said, "Hey Ann—"

\*

"And that's when Jack asked me if I was going to the club meeting and I said yes," she finished.

There was scattered applause.

The club meeting so far had been an extravaganza.

Rushing outside during recess, those present had gathered all sorts of empirical oddities: helicopter seed pods, a metal tube, a cigarette torn down the middle, a fragment of sandpaper. Then they'd snuck back inside the building and hijacked a social studies room, dark and unlocked. Walter wrote POWER CLUB on the white board. Present were:

Walter Josephson,

Kirkby Oz,

Germmy Shultz,

Alexia Dangerfield,

Anthony Patricola,

Jenny Backsay, and

Ann Wojek.

And Jack Nacheiander.

**Ann** was speaking crouched by a low table at the corner of a rug with a design of the alphabet on it in very bold characters and colors. She sensed **Walter** standing behind her, marker at the ready. **Kirkby Oz** was sitting on a beanbag like it was a chair, with his back very straight and his knees squared. **Germmy Shultz** was on the far side of the room, pacing back and forth, with his hands behind his back. **Alexia Dangerfield** and **Jenny Backsay** were joined at the hip. (Ann observed that Alexia would stand very sturdily, and gesture definitively with one of her forceful arms, while Jenny always seemed on the verge of toppling over, even if she was just standing there. Jenny wouldn't gesture with her arms, instead she merely raised or lowered a hand, and tilted. In any case, they were standing by the cubbies on the other side of the alphabet

rug.) Finally **Anthony Patricola** sat hunched on the desks; and **Jack Nacheinander** stood with his arms crossed by the sink.

“I think I can keep the thread going for like six seconds before I lose it,” reported Gergy, rounding a corner.

“Screw factors,” said Ann.

“Yeah screw factors,” said Kirkby. “No I can get behind factors.”

Before Ann had told her story, Walter, who now was resting his head meditatively against the whiteboard, had reported on his adventures in gym class.

He’d developed a means of simulating basketball. He would draw a line in his mind between the player with the ball and another player. Then he would drop a perpendicular bisector down to this line. He would slide up and down this perpendicular bisector, always in motion, updating as the location of the ball and the other player changed. Walter said that this created very realistic basketball movements, especially as the one degree of freedom, to move up and down the bisector, allowed him to jog at a pretty constant speed. Sometimes he would switch target players on gut instinct. That was the art of it, he said, more or less.

This had caused a great commotion.

“—and you’re pretty sure you didn’t look like an idiot?” Anthony inquired.

“I really feel like I blended in,” Walter said.

“Don’t call him an idiot,” said Jenny. “He had a *hypothesis*.”

“Wait! I’m thinking...” Gergy began. “Why not take two other players and the ball and keep track of the centroid where all the perpendicular bisectors of the sides of the triangle hit?”

“Centroid!!” said Walter. “I am the centroid!”

“What are you people talking about,” asked Anthony.

“Alexia, you were there, did you think I was really playing basketball?— Well, it’s just a way to play basketball,” said Walter.

“Walter, I think it would have worked well, but your eyes were always off in the wrong direction,” said Alexia.

“The eyes are very important,” said Ann.

“Okay, enough about that,” Kirkby Oz said, taking the floor. “I was sitting at the kitchen table drinking an espresso with my mother, and—”

“WHAAAT” shouted Alexia. Jenny lost her balance.

“Who are you Kirkby,” asked Anthony.

“So I have an espresso now and again,” said Kirkby shrugging. “They’re really easy to make.”

“Your mom doesn’t mind?” asked Alexia.

“Apparently not,” said Jenny.

“So I was drinking the espresso,” said Kirkby.

“Yeah go on,” said Walter.

“And I was sitting at the table. And I was wondering how sure I was that up wasn’t down and that down wasn’t up, because all of a sudden I felt like I was falling really slowly towards the ceiling. Like the chair was pushing me up and I was about to just come loose and like fall upwards,” said Kirkby

“Ooo,” said Walter.

“I think it was because my cousin is staying with us, and so I had to sleep on the air mattress. So while we were rearranging stuff, I propped it up on the wall for like some reason. So

I leaned back against it, and I was pretending, you know—and then it hit me, and it was just like I was flat in the bed! The reverse happened when I was in bed for real.”

“It’s crazy to think you can sleep on air,” said Walter.

“Yeah it just feels empty beyond you,” said Kirkby.

“Empty?” asked Walter. “Like just nothingness, pure nothings?”

“Like the endless void?” asked Gemy.

“The baleful VOID?” asked Walter.

“Yes, Walter, like the baleful void,” said Kirkby. “I slept on that. What about you Anthony?”

“Oh well,” Anthony said, standing up from the table, his butt still hanging little on it, which bared his ankles. “I was using my body. I was thinking about holding onto the railing of like this disk. This was when I was falling asleep after practice yesterday. I was trying to hold on for dear life, but I was also trying to swing myself around 360 at the same time. But I couldn’t do it. I’d swing around almost 360, but then I would knock against something with a clang and get pushed back. Then I’d almost go around again and clang again...”

“I’ve sometimes had like... those rotating wheel things for fishing poles in my head, and I’m trying to spin it in a circle in one direction, but it keeps accidentally going the other direction,” said Walter.

“Or where you just keep pulling out bits of your hair, even when you think you’re not,” said Jenny.

“One thing that I have learned is that you must discipline yourself,” said Anthony, in a deep gravelly voice. “There are two paths. The path of action and the path of passivity. The path of strength and the path of weakness. The one can be harnessed, forced into shape by the will.

The other is a kind of power that will not come when called; you must allow it to flow through you. The more you try to force yourself 360 the more you will fail.”

“Woah Anthony,” said Alexia.

“Guys guys,” said Walter, “think of this like peeing and pooping. Like to poop is the path of strength, you just go and try to force that stuff out of there. But to pee you have to sit there and wait for it to come to you. You have to pee by not peeing, but you can poop by pooping.”

“Walter,” said Gemy.

“Pooooooooop!” said Walter.

“Okay no but guys,” said Jenny. “I’m staring at the table right now.”

They fell silent. Ann followed her gaze.

“Do you see how red it is? It’s like the color is popping out into another dimension.”

They admired it.

“At yet, it’s so flat!” Walter said, closing one eye.

“So you guys just like art?” asked Ann suddenly.

“What?” said Jenny.

“Oh! It just seems like you guys are really just talking about art. You’re just using all these weird code words,” Ann said, turning a little uncertain.

“Like do you know about cubism? I love art,” she continued. “I had no idea that you guys...”

“You’re in GT Art,” said Jenny, meaning Gifted and Talented Art.

“Art’s cool,” said Walter.

“Yeah, we like classical art,” said Gemy.

“Only the classics,” said Walter.

Kirkby said, "My mom sells pottery."

"Yeah I think I have some, my mom was saying," said Alexia, gesturing. "It *is* very colorful. I highly recommend it."

"I should bring my cubism book to the next meeting," said Ann. "That'll make my dad happy."

"You did a painting once, didn't you Jenny," asked Alexia.

"I've done a painting," said Jenny. "The brain of a sea lamprey connected to the body of a robotic fish."

"It was from an actual GOVERNMENT document," said Walter.

"It was for military preparedness," said Anthony. "They were making predictions and one thing they thought they'd see was these sea lampreys."

"We sold it to Walter's brother for thirty dollars," said Alexia to Ann.

"Do you think George Bush knows about them?" asked Kirkby.

"Do you think George Bush knows about you," asked Anthony.

"George Bush has like Dick Cheney control the lampreys with his mind."

"George Bush is the robotic fish."

"George Bush... *Amurica*."

"Walter, did your brother vote?" asked Jenny.

The bell rang for recess to be over.

"Okay guys okay!" said Walter.

The group dispersed, scurrying to their respective classrooms. Then five minutes later the lockdown rang, and then they got dismissed, and so actually they got to continue their discussion.

Flurries were coming down at around 12:45 when Walter exited the building. The ground was low in all directions, so the flurries formed sheets that dove towards the ground, and curled upwards, scraping against the asphalt and melting. Pools of students were milling around, some near the wood chips, some leaning against the volcano which was a large metal pipe cone shape made for climbing with a pole to slide down the middle. Others were by the fence concealing the generator, or at top of the gentle hill by the administration parking spaces, their hands clenched in their pockets, standing at the very edge of the dirt, looking down at their teacher below them. The youngest kids raced outside into the snow, fourth graders, fifth graders, past agglomerations of eighth grade girls, most of the time not looking up at their teachers' faces. Across the parking lot, Jonathan Spud, who was wearing a pea coat in the eighth grade, had taken off his hat and was scraping up snow to pelt Jack Nacheinander, who was standing in a crowd, near the edge of the parking lot, so that he could see beyond the school, to the enormous field across the road.

Actually, it was two fields, and forest on either side deep in the periphery. Soy or wheat? A whole acre of land across from the school, and then a ridge, a tree in the very middle of it, and another field, and beyond the flurries, close to the grey clouds, was the landlocked battleship. It's red blinking light could easily be seen.

Walter got tired of looking for his friends, and wandered aimlessly. He was interested in the wood chips because the bumpiness played tricks with his mind. He was in no particular rush, which was one privilege of being a seventh grader.

In any case, he was in a good mood, enjoying the excitement that came from being near to something important enough to destroy.

He found Ann.

“You know what’s going on,” he asked her.

She made a face at him.

“Uh no.”

“I heard that we had to evacuate again because they were worried the battleship would be a target.”

“Doesn’t Germy’s dad work for them?”

“Yeah, I saw a binder of his one time. It was about cloaking devices for spy planes.”

Walter sniffled. Ann put on her hat.

“I really don’t want to go to the high school again,” said Ann. “Like last time.”

“Yeah the high school is pretty weird. The whole two floors thing...”

Germy came up to them.

“Aloha,” he said, permuting.

“Hey Mr Lockheed Martin do you think this is how it all starts?” asked Walter.

Germy squinted out towards the battleship.

“Uh yeah,” he said, nervously. “I hope my dad’s okay.”

“I think we’re just going to need to wait for more information,” said Walter, pacing. “We just need more information.”

He looked at them.

“You guys ever wonder what’s going on in there? I mean, we are on the cutting edge! It’s weird to think about.”

Ann had never thought about being on the cutting edge before, exactly.

“I’m just thinking,” said Gergy, “they really should be able to defend this place. I wonder if there are invisible aircraft here right.”

They inspected the sky over the warrens of boxy homes north and west. The flurries had intensified and Walter’s and Gergy’s and Ann’s shoulders were all covered in white. They sniffled the air, and held their arms close, and bobbed slightly from foot to foot.

“I hear they work on very important problems there...” Walter said.

“I was thinking about that square root of 2 stuff you said,” said Ann. “Walter. I was thinking about the square root—”

“Oh yeah of 2 stuff.”

“I was thinking...” said Ann, putting on her ear muffs. “Oh yeah, the thing that I don’t get. So you have the triangle. But why do you have to measure the diagonal line using the other two lines? Why can’t you just measure the diagonal as like 1 and then look at how long the other sides would be?”

“Ooo! Ooo!” said Gergy, looking up at the sky. “ $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$ . But  $a=b$ . So  $2a^2 = 1$  because the diagonal is 1. So  $a = 1/\sqrt{2}$ .”

“So it still has a square root of 2 in it?”

“Yessir!”

“So like,” said Ann, “so the first two lines measure the diagonal, and they find that it’s complicated like the square root of 2. While they’re both just 1. But when the diagonal measures the other two lines, it finds out now *they’re* complicated, and it’s 1. That’s weird. That’s what I was thinking about.”

“Dood! This is what the square root of 2 is all about,” sang Walter.

The buses were starting to show up.

“Guys stay there,” said Walter. He placed himself in front of Ann, and began walking angled away from Gerny towards the school.

“I’m surfing the diagonal!” he said. “But not really, because it doesn’t feel any different. It just feels like I’m going straight.”

“Well maybe you should turn your head,” said Ann. “Like make the diagonal but be looking behind your shoulder back at us. How do things look then?”

“Like twist my neck?” asked Walter.

“Yeah,” said Ann.

Walter flexed, and rolled his neck around like he’d seen people do to loosen up when he was at camp and they had dancing class.

“Okay,” he said.

He looked back over at the school.

“Do you think they’re getting into the buses?” he asked.

“FLURVIS! It’s going to take forever,” said Gerny. “I just know.”

“Okay.”

Walter gingerly rotated his head about ninety degrees. To the right of his vision he could just see Gerny. He began to walk up and to the right. He rotated his head a bit further. A sliver more of Gerny came into view. So far so good.

—all of a sudden he felt like he had to cough and whipped his head back around so he could let it out—

“Whew!” he said.

“How’s it going?” asked Ann.

“Oh good,” said Walter. He repositioned his head. He started walking again. He had to crane even more to see the effect, which was everything slinking away from him at this fortyfive degree angle. It was a very dramatic dolly shot. Hard to pay attention to it because of the tension in his neck. Only like five more feet to go.

“Anyway, I was thinking sometimes,” said Ann, “I live over past those houses, and at night I can hear a noise outside my window, that I think comes from that battleship. It sounds just like that tritone.”

“Do you think they’re doing something to the plants in the field?!” asked Walter, very roughly, but softly, three feet away. “I’ve seen some crazy stuff.”

“With the sound?”

“Maybe it’s giving them energy,” he said, whispering, at the last two feet.

“Guys, it’s just probably a generator,” said Gergy.

“But why *that* sound?” asked Ann.

“Okay, okay, maybe they’re housing the rift there,” said Walter breathlessly, almost at the finish line. “And harnessing the energy of it in a generator. And some sound leaks out. Okay!” he said, halting. “I did it.”

“Did you see anything?” asked Gergy.

All of a sudden Ann saw her mother’s SUV come speeding down the long strip towards the school from the left.

“Hey that’s my mom,” said Ann.

“What,” Walter said, and they all turned to look.

“What the heck is she doing here,” asked Ann.

The three kids walked over to the bushes as the fat green car, whose ancestor had been a military vehicle, veered into the school driveway, and pulled up the relatively long strip. Ann's mom drove onto the grass, parked, and opened the door.

"Ann!" she said.

"Hey mom," said Ann.

Ann came around the hood of the car, while Walter and Gemy held back a little and strayed by the front tire. Ann's mom extracted herself from the front seat. She was wearing black jeans, a grey sweatshirt with no design on it, and a puffy jacket with grayish fur around the hood. When she stood, Walter could see her coat pockets were filled with tissues.

Ann's mother cupped her daughter's face with her hands.

"Your dad called me when he heard about the plane. He overheard them talking about it at the bike shop—by the way, he brought your green bike in for the brakes," said Ann's mom.

"Oh!" Ann said.

"I was just sitting in the kitchen. They said you were being evacuated. So I came over."

She ran her fingers through her daughter's hair.

"What happened?!" asked Walter.

Ann's mom turned to Walter.

"Oh a plane went down," she said. "Came down across the sky and sliced into the field on the other side of that thing." She gestured toward the battleship. "It was Vernon Dill's private plane."

"Vernon Dill!" said Walter. "Oh man!"

"Who's Vernon Dill?" asked Gemy.

"He's the dude who lives in the giant mansion," said Walter.

“That’s true,” said Ann’s mom. “He moved in Morsetown a few years ago, after building his estate. He had the Commerce Bank fortune. You know like on Main Street?” Ann’s mom gestured in the general direction. “He was president of Commerce Bank.”

“So... what happened to him?” asked Walter.

“Oh he’s fine,” said Ann’s mom. “I don’t even think he was in the plane when it went down. I don’t think you’re supposed to fly in flurries. I drove past it. It seems like they just lost control of the plane, and it came swooping down, just missed an intersection, and left a huge trail before it split up.”

“Did you see anyone dead?” asked Ann.

“Well, I just drove past,” said her mom. “It was a small plane.”

“You didn’t stop to look?” asked Ann.

“Well, I had to come get you, honey,” said her mom.

“Maybe I’ll just go on the buses,” said Ann, looking down. “I was thinking of going to play with Walter and Gergy.”

“You want to go to the high school on a bus, and then take another bus?” asked her mom.

“Maybe Walter and Gergy could help me about factors,” said Ann. “You guys would do that, right?” she asked.

“Yep yep,” said Walter.

“Sure,” said Gergy.

“Nice to meet you, Walter and Gergy,” said Ann’s mother. “But I don’t think Ann can play today.”

“What?” said Ann.

“I said, we’re all just going to go home now.”

Ann closed her eyes.

“Why do you always have to do this?” asked Ann.

“We’ve talked about this, Ann,” said her mother.

“And I can’t even ride my bike! Thanks to dad!” said Ann.

“You wouldn’t be able to ride your bike anyway,” said her mom.

“SAYS WHO?” asked Ann.

Ann’s mother turned to Walter and Gergy. “Do you two have siblings?” she asked. “How do *your* parents deal with children who have an attitude problem?”

“Do you have to ruin everything?” asked Ann.

“Me ruin everything,” asked her mom.

“Yes! You!” cried Ann.

“Someday you are going to realize that I know more about this world than you can even imagine,” said Ann’s mom.

“Oh I can imagine!” she yelled.

“For example you still think yelling is way to get your way!” her mom yelled. “Why don’t you yell some more maybe I’ll change my mind!”

“I CAN IMAGINE!” yelled Ann.

“I CAN IMAGINE TOO,” yelled her mom. “You are so selfish,” she continued in a quieter voice, “that you can’t even realize it.”

Ann’s mom looked over at Walter and Gergy again.

“I’m sorry about this,” she said.

“Why don’t you just go back and look at those bodies some more,” Ann said. “I’ll just wait for dad to pick me up.”

“GET IN THE CAR, YOU LITTLE MOUTHY GIRL,” said her mom. “Your dad’s not coming home until late.”

“Oh why’s that?” asked Ann.

“GET IN THE CAR,” said her mom.

“But why?!”

“GET IN THE CAR RIGHT THIS INSTANT.” Ann’s mom slammed her hand against the hood.

“I’m not going unless Walter and Gergy come,” said Ann.

She shrugged, holding back tears.

“That’s just how it is.”

“Get in,” growled her mother.

Ann didn’t budge.

Her mom hissed.

“In!” she said. “All of you!”

“Maybe I should get on the bus,” said Gergy.

“Wonderful,” said Ann’s mother.

“I’ll come, though” said Walter. “I live just down the street.”

Ann’s mother slammed the driver’s side door. Ann walked to the passenger side, looking down at the grass.

“I’ll be seeing you,” said Walter to Gergy.

“No I’ll come,” said Gergy.

They hopped in the backseat. The three kids and Ann’s mom slung their seat belts across their chests, and buckled in. It was warm in the car. The air vents were going full blast. Walter

put his hand to the cold window, and then to the hot vent, and then back to the cold window. The flurries were zooming intensely across the windshield.

“Mrs. Wojek,” said Walter. “We’ve all had a pretty exhausting day.”

“Oh really Walter?”

Coming to the field, they made a right, and continued down that road.

“It feels weird,” Walter said. “I’m putting my hand on the cold window, and then on the hot vent, and switching back and forth. Do you guys like it to be cold and refreshing when you go to bed, but warm and cozy when you wake up, or the other way around?” he asked.

“Walter, what happened to your eyebrow?” asked Ann’s mom. “Did you get burned?”

Ann kicked the glove compartment.

“Uh,” said Walter. “Oh wait, Mrs. Wojeck. I wanted to ask you. We were talking about maybe there’s this sound that comes out of the battleship at night and affects the plants.”

“Yeah I said that wasn’t possible,” said Gemy.

Ann had her arms crossed and was staring at the side mirror.

“You’re worried about the plants,” said Ann’s mom, darkly. “Honey,” she said. “What you don’t know. You don’t know that everything is poisoned.”

Walter laughed.

“Everything?” asked Walter.

“Oh everything, Walter” said Ann’s mom with evident pleasure. “Everyone’s trying to get their hands on some sustenance, food, water, life. And there is a massive society designed to harvest this sustenance while keeping it tightly regulated and confined.”

“Oh.”

“Money is a lie. It’s a way of starving off the populace who aren’t need to run the harvest.”

She came to a red light.

“Everything they give you is poison,” said Ann’s mom. “That’s right. The food, the water. You take it to stay alive, but everything has ill effects. Everything you buy is contraband. They’ll arrest you for what you just bought. Even though you bought it, it’s still illegal. Everything is illegal. They just can’t prosecute all the cases because it would take too long.”

She made a left.

“Once there was a very powerful sustenance on earth,” Ann’s mom continued. “But not one person could help themselves from taking a piece and soon it was all gone. Now it’s in the dirt.”

“SHUT UP,” screamed Ann. “SHUT UP!”

They were pulling up to another red light.

There was a strange roar of rising intensity that wasn’t coming from the car in front of them.

Everybody paused.

Walter twisted his neck back to look out the window; he saw a flatbed truck come to a stop beside them, with a monstrous gleaming snorting face. Strapped to the flatbed was a wing of the plane that had crashed.

Immediately Walter saw that the airplane wing was hollow. Flurries were rushing across the open mouth of the bent hollow wing and streaming off to the side of the road. This was the source of the roar. The wing itself was emitting an enormous sympathetic tritonal chord from its cavity, cradling the expanse of the spectrum, the octaves. Walter could feel this throat rise

through the twist. The truck was rumbling the windows, as was the air inside the wing complexifying, the churned up air churning more air in ever more intricate ways—so that middle of the wing storm, Walter heard a familiar shout as something emerged which had the power of the human call.

Walter unbuckled his seatbelt. He gathered in his breath.

“Hey guys I have an idea.”

Then he cried at the top of his voice: “ANN GERM MY LET’S GET THE HECK OUT OF HERE!!”

And they did!

Like one organism, the two unbuckled their seatbelts, the three flung themselves out their respective doors left unshut, racing separately to the back of the flatbed truck, and hoisting themselves up the short ladder. Once on the surface, they fled through the wall of flurries into the wing where it was deafening. Not once did they look into each other’s eyes.

It was too loud to talk.

Meanwhile the light had turned green. The truck started to move, and soon it was going forty five miles an hour.

After a moment of shock, Ann’s mother pushed the accelerator down so hard that all the doors promptly shut themselves. She came speeding up behind the truck.

The driver saw her in his rear view mirror. Without thinking, he started accelerating too.

Ann’s mom accelerated even more, and the expression of intensity in her eyes, combined with the hulk of the tank-like SUV, put the driver in a state of alarm. He doubled down on the accelerating. Ann’s mom jerked along the road. She started looking like she was going to switch

lanes, like she was going to force him from the road. He could see a herd of cars hurtling towards him from the other direction. There was a flat meadow coming up to his left.

He expertly pulled off the road and went barreling across the meadow.

In the dark cavity of the wing, over the bumps in the dirt, Ann and Walter had a hold of each other just to crouch; Gerny, who was a little taller, grabbed Walter's shoulder as he was being thrown. Through their coats they could feel how warm they all were. The red branches which filled their insides began to pulse in time, and stretch and dilate. Like when people sleep in a bed together, who beat in time to the pattern of each other's radiation, without sight, without sound, with only hot and cold as guides.

The truck finally stopped.

When they emerged, Ann's mother was running towards them.

She scooped Ann up, held her closely, and keened.

"My brother is going to love this," Walter decided.

Gerny vomited into the wing of the plane.